



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ART. V.—*Life of William Blake, “Pictor Ignotus,” with Selections from his Poems and other Writings.* By the late ALEXANDER GILCHRIST. Illustrated from Blake’s own Works, in Fac-simile by W. J. LINTON, and in Photolithography; with a few of Blake’s original Plates. London and Cambridge: Macmillan & Co. 1863. 2 vols. 8vo. pp. xiv., 389; viii., 268.

THE readers of the two volumes which contain the Life of William Blake, selections from his writings, and illustrations of his art, have reason to thank the biographer and his editors, the brothers Rossetti, for the faithfulness with which they have collected and arranged such material as exists for representing a man who has long waited, and must still perhaps long wait, for due recognition by the world. Blake died in 1827; the thirty years and more which have passed since then furnish sufficient perspective for a correct delineation of his life, and while some details which it would have been interesting to know have doubtless been lost, the most valuable authentication of personal knowledge remains. There are still living those who as young men talked with him, looked on his face, watched him at work, and finally followed him with reverence to his grave. The reminiscences of these men, now occupying honorable places in English art, are among the most interesting memorabilia of Blake, and are especially valuable as certifying by their harmony of feeling to the truth of the account which Mr. Gilchrist has given of the life which Blake led.

This account has been drawn up after a painstaking examination of all the sources of information: it is thorough as respects the external features of Blake’s life, and does not offend by an officious analytic exhibition of that which lay behind; while the biographer has furnished to the critical reader most excellent material for discovering the more remote current of the artist’s life. We can easily forgive certain affectations of style, bungling English, and what we think an occasional ill-mannered air, for the affectionate interest which the biographer feels in his subject, and for the confident belief in Blake’s genius and sanity which makes him willing to tell

all that he can learn about the man : a more timid biographer might have hesitated about making so open an exhibition of his hero's singularities. Nor can we refrain from sincere praise of the manner in which the editors have performed their part ; the comprehensive catalogue of the artist's works, and the discriminating remarks upon those works, add much to the value of this biography. However the credit is to be apportioned between the biographer and his editors, we are indebted to both for the conception that we are enabled to form of what Blake was as an artist and as a man of genius.

His name has for two generations stood for one who for some reason was unrecognized by the world, consigned by it, in default of a more exact classification, to the order of "men of insane genius," whose works should interest rather the psychologist than one who wished simply to gratify his love for the beautiful. Among students of art, indeed, he has had a distinct place, by virtue chiefly of his two best-known works, the illustrations to *Blair's Grave* and *Inventions to the Book of Job* ; but even such students have rarely been able to study any other of his works, and doubtless many have accepted the name which the world had given him — the mad Blake — as correct in its application to his life and to the great mass of his productions, which never had found their way to the public eye. These volumes will, we are sure, once and for all establish Blake in the position to which his powers entitle him, and set him by himself as a man of genius, whose designs, whose writings, and whose life have a wonderful harmony, and who, if he represents any school of art, represents one which has numbered few others among its members.

It is, however, not easy to treat Blake otherwise than as an individual, and it is easier so to regard him, since the world rejected him as having too little in common with it, and the men with whom properly he may be compared are themselves individual men : there is, indeed, no comparison, in the case of Blake, so effective as that which measures him in one form of expression by himself in another form. There is no poet with whom Blake the artist can be compared so fit to the purpose as Blake the poet, and the man Blake finds his best explanation and illustration in a comparison with the poet and the

painter Blake. If genius eludes our comprehension by its intangibility, we have at least the advantage here of grasping at it in diverse forms. Perhaps, by pursuing this man through the various shapes which his nature assumed, we may be able to reach an apprehension of one who, while exhibiting himself in a complex manner to the world outside, holding some converse with it through his pen and pencil, was all the while living a life which was more wonderful and more lovely than all the creations to which it gave birth.

Born in 1757, Blake lived to near the close of his seventy-first year. In his forty-third year he took residence near Chichester for three years, to fulfil an engagement with Hayley, Cowper's biographer; but excepting that short period, he lived uninterruptedly in London. He was the son of a tradesman, who favored his decided inclination for art by putting him first to a drawing-school, and four years afterward apprenticing him to an engraver, under whose instruction Blake acquired the art which was to be his chief support in life. His apprenticeship closed when he was twenty-one, but he remained under his father's roof, pursuing his studies in the Royal Academy, until in his twenty-fifth year he married and removed to apartments of his own, thereafter living as well as he could upon the work of his graver and his pencil. For forty-five years he worked with constant industry, engraving when he must, designing and composing when he could. The incomplete list of works engraved by him contains about eighty titles, many of which represent a large number of plates; the list of his original works exceeds four hundred, some of which were often repeated; and he asserted that he had written more than Shakespeare and Homer together. Yet with all his industry he never more than kept want at arm's length. If it had been Blake's object to gain a fortune by his labor, he must be set down as having woefully failed, after such an expense of energy.

During this long life of patient labor, Blake took no pains to conceal himself from the world. He had no wish, for he had no need, to lead a hermit life; it is only natures weak in confidence that have to fortify their spiritual life by withdrawing from the world. Blake liked society, and enjoyed what

he could get ; and that was of an excellent sort, for while his humble origin would have excluded him from good society, his profession as an artist introduced him not only to the company of fellow-artists, but to that of the patrons and lovers of art. He never wanted for friends who could recognize power in him, though practical assistance was mainly from one or two generous men like Mr. Butts and Mr. Linnell, who enjoyed the rare privilege of enabling the artist to produce everlasting works. When he grew old, he could find among the young men an enthusiastic acknowledgment of his power, such as he had ceased to look for among his contemporaries. And yet, always frank, always ready to be approached, and fulfilling with fidelity the orders given him, Blake failed to win in his day a reputation at all commensurate with his genius. While Stothard was winning fame and easy popularity, and Lawrence was at the top of notoriety, Blake was living obscurely ; and even near the close of his life we find him engraving designs of his more fortunate friend Flaxman, designs which he knew to be inferior to his own conceptions. If, then, it had been Blake's object to gain reputation by his labor, we must confess that here also he met with failure.

He did desire recognition, and his ill-success in obtaining it, set in stronger shade by the contrasted light of the reputation of those whom he justly regarded as less worthy, made him feel that he had suffered injustice, and wrung from him many bitter words and pungent criticisms. This very sensitiveness to neglect bears witness to his strong human sympathy. He wanted others to think and feel as he did. If he had been by nature so independent of human sympathy as to design and compose simply for the gratification of exerting special power, he would not have excited such profoundly tender emotions as some of his words inspire, nor have flashed such light upon the mysteries of life and immortality as his pencil sheds, nor indeed would he in his old age have attracted about him a band of youthful disciples. Blake did desire recognition ; he desired it for his own sake, and for the sake of others. When he was struggling with the world, he thought to find satisfaction in a wide fame ; but when fame and fortune were offered to him if he would give up his chosen manner of life, he chose

to live in poverty and obscurity. "They pity me," he would say of Lawrence and other prosperous artists, who condescended to visit him; "but 't is they are the just objects of pity. I possess my visions and peace. They have bartered their birthright for a mess of pottage."

What, then, was the birthright which Blake valued above gold and fame? To retain what did he hold all else as cheap? It was an endowment of nature which falls sometimes to misers, sometimes to spendthrifts, sometimes also to wise men. Blake accepted the trust reposed in him, and the aim of his life, consciously or unconsciously, was to multiply this endowment, and to use it, neither hoarding it like a selfish egotist, nor wasting the fountains of his wealth like a fool. He once wrote, in his usual positive fashion: "Knowledge of ideal beauty is not to be acquired. It is born with us. Innate ideas are in every man, born with him; they are truly himself. The man who says that we have no innate ideas must be a fool and knave; having no *con*-science, or *innate* science." Whatever may be the value of this statement as a general truth, it was impossible for Blake to believe otherwise, for the testimony of his own mental experience confirmed the doctrine. The ideas which he held were the objects of an instinctive perception, and the resultant truths, whether in art or in philosophy, were not so much generated from these ideas in the direct line of logical deduction, as radiated from them in separate clusters. His mind was of the order of instinctive natures; his perceptions were instinctive, his judgment based upon those perceptions equally instinctive, and by a natural relation of ideas he was possessed of an unbounded faith in his own nature, a faith which no hard shocks of worldly experience, no demonstration of absurd conclusions, ever shattered, or even weakened.

With this instinctive perception of ideal beauty, and an unbounded faith in the infallibility of his mental vision, Blake might have been wholly, what he was in part, a seer, discerning what was hidden to the dull eye of sense, penetrating the secrets of life and the outward creation, and delivering himself in oracular sentences that should half reveal, half conceal truth, revealing so far as a kindred power of sight could ap-

preciatingly follow, concealing and misguiding when sense offered a distorted medium. But there was added, in Blake's case, the constructive power of a glorious imagination, and the seer became a poet, using both pen and pencil, but requiring still a responsive nature in any one who should, we will not say receive, but in many cases even perceive, what he had to deliver. His imagination, with its wonderful facility of creation, was constantly vitiating his worth as a seer, by enclosing his spiritual discoveries in such forms as bore no semblance of human realities, thus taking away from those who would understand him the common symbol which should serve as the key to his meaning. What grand philosophic truths may be imbedded in the "Jerusalem" we know not, nor is it worth while to attempt to discover; they are there, if there at all, in images which may be hieroglyphs, but their author has supplied no key to them.

No doubt, also, the extravagance of some of Blake's words and pictures was heightened by the separation which had taken place between himself and the world. He had at first been affected by a sense of the deficiency of imagination in others, and had suited his creations somewhat to the average capacity of men; but when the world refused to listen to his more open declarations and rejected him, he quietly rejected the world, and thenceforth wrote for the countless multitude of unseen spirits whom he felt to be about him. They needed no sense aids to the understanding, and he poured his conceptions forth, wholly careless of the indefiniteness of form which they might assume. So completely did he live in the world which he had cast about himself, — so constantly did he look through it to the outer, busy world of other men, — that we find him in a public address saying of some calumniators who attacked him in the columns of the *Examiner*: "The manner in which I have rooted out the nest of villains will be seen in a poem concerning my three years' Herculean labors at Felpham, which I shall soon publish. Secret calumny and open professions of friendship are common enough all the world over, but have never been so good an occasion of poetic imagery." This poem was "Jerusalem," and it makes us smile to see the innocent man answering the *Examiner* in the mysteries of Jerusalem!

It is manifest that imagination was the chief endowment of his nature; in this faculty lay his power, and the exercise of it was from first to last attended by a childlike faith in its creations. In childhood he saw trees filled with angels, bright, angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars, and when he saw hay-makers at work, he saw also what those honest men may safely be said not to have seen, angels walking in the midst of them. One day a traveller was telling bright wonders of some foreign city. "Do you call *that* splendid?" broke in young Blake; "I should call a city splendid in which the houses were of gold, the pavement of silver, the gates ornamented with precious stones." These were childish, unreasoning notions; when he came to be a man of fifty, he wrote: "Imagination [is] the real and eternal world, of which this vegetable universe is but a faint shadow; and in which we shall live, in our eternal or imaginative bodies, when these vegetable, mortal bodies are no more." And again: "All things exist in the human imagination."

The practical and unquestioning use of an extraordinary power of imagination finds a legitimate issue in this doctrine, and hence, as his biographer justly remarks, "this last line contains what deserves to be called the corner-stone of Blake's philosophy. . . . Amid all contradictions, incoherences, wild assertions, this principle—that the conceptions of the mind are the realities of realities, that the human imagination is an eternal world, 'ever expanding in the bosom of God'—shines steadily forth; and to readers of a speculative turn, who will be at the pains to examine by its light these erratic writings, the chaos will resolve itself into *substance*, though not into form and order. It is needless to tell such thinkers that Bishop Berkeley was one on the list of Blake's favorite authors. But, with his fervid, dauntless imagination, the artist seized hold of the metaphysician's theory of Idealism, and quickened it into a grand poetic reality."

If Blake had been merely a philosopher, speculating about the material and spiritual, we should doubtless have found in him the usual practical infidelity that characterizes philosophers of this school; like them he would have confessed with his mouth to the truth of a dogma, from which he would have

withheld the practical allegiance that leads one to base his daily conduct upon a faith in the principles avowed. But Blake was not a speculative philosopher. He seemed to have theories in common with such philosophers, but it was because the terms of language adopted by them expressed nearly enough his ideas, so far as they were capable of exact expression. When Blake said, 'All things exist in the human imagination,' he used a phrase which Berkeley might have assented to, but Blake meant a great deal more than Berkeley would have done by the words. His was not merely a speculative, it was a practical belief, having all its value in the meaning which it gave to his art and life, while with men merely philosophic the belief is valued solely for the gratification it affords the intellect in solving problems and performing mental gymnastics.

It is important to understand this characteristic of Blake's mind, since it enables us to credit him with the utmost good faith in his wildest vagaries, and to comprehend that what perhaps amuses us as a fancy was to this singular man a reality of the most solid sort. If we would apprehend him, it is not so necessary that we should comprehend his visions, as that we should bear in mind the fact that these visions were not the plays of his fancy, from which he could withdraw to more rational and appreciable occupations, but that they were the most complete and the highest expressions of his soul, believed such by himself, and accepted by him with full assurance that in following the lead of his imagination he was obeying the voice of God.

This twofold belief of Blake's—the practical faith in his visions, and the speculative belief in their existence through the agency of his own imagination—served to confuse men in regard to the reality of his visions. They were entangled in the effort to separate an objective from the subjective reality; and the attempt to do more than accept the subjective reality of the visions rested solely upon the ground of their confidence in Blake's veracity. Thus he would say, "I saw Socrates to-day: he said to me thus and thus." If his hearer were content to believe in Blake's sincerity of imagination, it was the utmost that he could reasonably do, and so far could

rest and make what was possible out of Socrates's observation, regarded as a morsel of wisdom, wholly impersonal. But if he questioned as to the actual appearance of Socrates to Blake, and accepted Socrates's observation, not as a bit of wisdom to be judged absolutely, but as a sort of Socratic deliverance, Blaked off upon him, he was likely to end in believing Blake insane, lest his own sanity should be imperilled.

The visionary heads which Blake drew in the company of John Varley furnish an example to the point. These remarkable productions were professedly copies of what Blake at the moment saw. He would see King Edward I., and looking up now and then, with most perfect composure, at his imaginary sitter, would draw his portrait. Varley, who had faith in Blake's power of vision and also in Blake's doctrine that it was a universal gift, sat beside him, and, since he made some profession to a spiritual sight, being an astrologer in his way, looked wistfully in the direction to which Blake's eyes pointed, in earnest hope of seeing the same sight. He was honest and looked as hard as he could, but his honesty compelled him to confess that he saw no king before his eyes. He tried, in fact, after letting his mind go its proper length of believing in Blake's sincerity, to make it go further, and believe, not only that the king really appeared to Blake through Blake's first creating the king that should appear, but also that the king was objectively present and ought to show himself to him also.

A more rational believer was Mrs. Blake. The picture of her life with Blake has been most tenderly touched by the biographer. She was as unquestioning a believer in Blake as Blake was in himself. He exercised, by virtue of his will, a strong influence over her mind. Husband and wife, if mated and not merely married, come by long intercourse, even when surrounded by constant attendants, to have a likeness of face, indicative of an equilibrium of character. Blake and his wife, living almost by themselves, attained a twinship of nature. She had originally his simple faith, by education something of his imagination, and after a while she also began to have visions. She had undoubting confidence in her husband's sincerity. She believed that he really saw what he saw, but

she instinctively avoided the irrational step of trying to believe that she also saw identically with him. Her visions were all her own, of the same general nature as Blake's, but of a humbler sort.

If Blake's faculty of seeing and his faculty of constructing are constantly betraying each other, leading him to veil his really profound spiritual discoveries in forms that refuse to symbolize anything for ordinary minds, it is yet easy to understand that, when he does succeed in bounding by intelligible words and lines the realities which his soul dwells among, we are likely to come upon marvellously noble results, and also to be constantly disappointed by the flitting of some delicate creation, which we thought we had seized, out of the light into chaotic darkness. Hence in Blake's poetry the finest expression of his genius is its power to open for the soul sudden vistas of immortality, to conduct it by means of a half-recognized emotion into fair fields whither it would lack the power to go of itself. We are not sure but the finest power of genius in poetry is always thus. Let the reader feel at one with Wordsworth's "Ode on the Intimations of Immortality," and see if its profound beauty is not owing to its sudden opening of gates at which the speculative soul might knock forever in vain. Just so is it with certain poems of Blake's, especially those in the "Songs of Innocence." One cannot analyze them, but, if there be any sympathy of feeling, they will sound to the soul like heavenly voices, opening the gates of a Paradise, once lost but never forgotten. Truly did Blake say, in his quaint fashion :

"I give you the end of a golden string :
Only wind it into a ball,
It will lead you in at Heaven's gate,
Built in Jerusalem wall."

There is a subtle element in Blake's poetry, disengaging one from objects of sense and leading the enchanted spirit on a far journey. A similar power in different form appears in certain poems of Coleridge, which was heightened, if we are to believe his contemporaries, by the recital of the poet. The entranced listeners might float with Coleridge to Xanadu, to get back as they could at the unfortunate end of the poet's vocal journey,

while he travelled on by himself, whither no one but himself could tell, and whither, alas! he has failed to tell us. It is related by his biographer, that Blake used to sing his songs to music which he had composed, but which never was written down. What angelic melody it ought to have been!

This peculiar power in Blake's poetry is deepened by the extreme simplicity of language and symbols. It is because the lamb meant so much to him, because mere childhood was the symbol of so glorious a reality that he never thought to waste language on the accidents of such symbols. One of the most familiar of his poems is the Introduction to his "Songs of Innocence"; it has been placed most fittingly at the entrance of Coventry Patmore's "Children's Garland." How utterly devoid of meaning this must be to a large number of worthy people, who would be quite gracious over the matter-of-fact, but by no means common-place, little poem of "Blind Man's Buff" in Blake's "Poetical Sketches"! and of those who acknowledge instinctively its poetic merit, how many are charmed simply with the exquisite melody and the childlike spirit that pervade it! But one who catches at its ethereal beauty reads it again and again, unable to tell himself what is its precise charm, and yet moved even to tears by the distant tones which are sung behind those spoken words.

But the very indefiniteness of this revelation borders on the total eclipse which Blake's visionary sun so frequently suffered, and, half perceiving his meaning, one is too often led on to the regions of darkness and left hopelessly bewildered. Such a poem as "The Crystal Cabinet" deceives one with its easy flow and difficult interpretation. Blake understood it, or he could not have written such a lovely lyric; but the reader is baffled by its coquetry with his understanding.

If this element in Blake's poetry is the finest, it is by its very nature limited. It is too fine to be grand, and if it were the only power of which we could lay hold, we should be disappointed, feeling that his poetry was but a partial disclosure of Blake's genius. There is a grander power united with it, which raises some of the poems to loftier heights. Who is he that wrote these lines, which he calls "Holy Thursday"? he is the same that designed "When the morning stars sang

together,"—"a design," says Dante Rossetti, "which never has been surpassed in the whole range of Christian art."

"I was on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
Came children walking two and two, in red, and blue, and green :
Grey-headed beadles walk'd before, with wands as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Paul's, they like Thames' waters flow.

"O what a multitude they seem'd, these flowers of London town,
Seated in companies they were, with radiance all their own :
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,
Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent hands.

"Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of heaven among :
Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor.
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door."

What if Blake wrote uncounted reams of unintelligible, bottomless prose and verse. Throw into the scales the whole rubbish, if you choose to call it so, of Jerusalem, Europe, Milton, Urizen, Song of Los, Book of Ahania, and all the rest of the named and nameless productions of Blake's untiring pen, they never will avail a feather's weight to depress the value of the few heavenly poems that we can read.

Blake has fitly named two books of his poems "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience." Experience never shook his faith in heaven, but it did disturb his confidence in men, and the latter collection is interesting as disclosing the new aspect of the world to him, when the rude shock which the French Revolution in its development gave to dreams of innocence passed over his mind. Many of the poems in this book are antithetical to the sweeter, more trustful lyrics of the former, and while they possess frequently a strength and even a wild, stormy character, they lapse also into the common-places to which the mind resorts, weary and disgusted with the revelations forced upon it. From the further selections presented in the volume of Blake's writings, one poem may be cited for its dramatic power, its sternness, and searching truth. It is named

"THE TWO SONGS.

"I heard an Angel singing
When the day was springing :
' Mercy, Pity, and Peace
Are the world's release.'

“ So he sang all day
Over the new-mown hay,
Till the sun went down,
And haycocks looked brown.

“ I heard a Devil curse
Over the heath and the furze :
‘ Mercy could be no more
If there were nobody poor,
And Pity no more could be .
If all were happy as ye :
And mutual fear brings Peace.
Misery’s increase
Are Mercy, Pity, Peace.’

“ At his curse the sun went down,
And the heavens gave a frown.”

It is easy to see that poetry is wholly incompetent to contain some of the most characteristic of Blake’s inventions and discoveries. The failure of “Jerusalem,” and similar writings, to convey any notion of Blake’s meaning, seems due in large part to his mistake in trying to employ a medium wholly inadequate, while there was in his reach another much more perfect. Thus, while the lovely designs that border the “Songs of Innocence” are truly illustrative, they do not of themselves convey so perfectly Blake’s meaning as do the songs. On the other hand, in the prophetic books the illustrative borders are frequently much more capable of *some* interpretation than the verses which they are supposed to embellish. Indeed, throughout these enigmatical books there must be, from the examples furnished in the biography, many noble designs. Trying to worry some meaning out of the “Jerusalem,” the reader comes upon the design of the crucifixion, and turns with relief to that,—a wonderful picture, even in the fac-simile,—as containing a world of meaning.

If Blake’s imagination in its bold flights thus hindered the clear statement of what he saw, by constructing symbols unintelligible to men, in the case of his designs the reverse aid rendered by his faculty of instinctive perception to that of imagination is equally remarkable. Lines can be drawn in any direction, and an *insane* imagination, that is, one wholly disjoined from the order of which it is one component, can be

conceived as making monstrous designs, and claiming truth and beauty for them. But Blake could see as well as make, and he perceived the truth of form and color with marvellous quickness and accuracy. His writings abound with such expressions as these, indicating the principles which controlled his pencil : —

“Invention depends altogether upon execution or *organization*. As that is right or wrong, so is the invention perfect or imperfect. Michael Angelo’s art depends on Michael Angelo’s execution altogether.”

“Execution is the chariot of Genius.”

“The character and expression in this picture [The Canterbury Pilgrims] could never have been produced with Rubens’s light and shadow, or with Rembrandt’s, or anything Venetian or Flemish. The Venetian and Flemish practice is broken lines, broken masses, and broken colors ; Mr. B.’s practice is unbroken lines, unbroken masses, and unbroken colors. Their art is to lose form ; his is to find form and to keep it. His arts are opposite to theirs in all things.”

“General knowledge is remote knowledge ; it is in particulars that wisdom consists, and happiness too. Both in art and in life general masses are as much art as a pasteboard man is human. Every man has eyes, nose, and mouth ; this every idiot knows ; but he who enters into and discriminates most minutely the manners and intentions, the characters in all their branches, is the alone wise or sensible man ; and on this discrimination all art is founded. I entreat, then, that the spectator will attend to the hands and feet ; to the lineaments of the countenance ; they are all descriptive of character, and not a line is drawn without intention, and that most discriminate and particular. As poetry admits not a letter that is insignificant, so painting admits not a grain of sand or a blade of grass insignificant, — much less an insignificant blur or mark.”

Admirable doctrine ! but what was Blake’s practice ? In poetry he failed oftener than he succeeded, but the language of poetry is ductile ; it can be led to great lengths before it breaks, and Blake’s imagination did thus manipulate it. Not so with the language of art ; lines are more inflexible, and there, moreover, are always present the great patterns of nature by which to judge them. Hence, armed with this truth which he so clearly apprehended, Blake did in design succeed far oftener than he failed. Everywhere we find firm outline enclosing his conception, — no vagueness of idea hiding behind

indistinctness of drawing, concealing itself in shades. Blake held that he drew what he saw, and inasmuch as he saw angels more distinctly than some artists seem to see men, he drew them boldly, gave them something to exist in, instead of adopting a common trick, and trying to conceal a fearful absence of body by an unmistakable presence of clothing.

As an artist, Blake will be judged chiefly by his two best known works, the *Inventions to the Book of Job*, and the *Illustrations of Blair's Grave*. The former of these is exclusively Blake's, since he engraved his own designs; the latter, fine as it is, does not exhibit Blake so truly, since his designs were engraved by another. It is in fact Blake translated, and many, no doubt, would prefer this translation to the original, because it is in the vernacular. The translation, excellent indeed, proves the real greatness of the original, for genius is in it. It is no purpose of ours to dwell upon the technic excellences of Blake's art, but we cannot help calling attention to the admirable illustration which this work offers of Blake's application of the doctrine contained in the paragraph last quoted. Let the spectator of these designs "attend to the hands and the feet"; he will see that "not a line is drawn without intention," but that, on the contrary, powerful meaning has been expressed through these members.

The *Job*, however, it is that enshrines Blake's genius, and as a whole it is doubtless the most perfect work of art which came from his pencil; perfect in the sense of completeness of the idea all of Blake's designs may be declared to be, but whereas many are but outlines, this is filled up in detail. The series of twenty-one designs are by no means chance illustrations of the most striking points in the *Book of Job*; there is an epic unity, independent of the book illustrated. One is startled to see how Blake has seized upon a *middle* to the series, not expressed in *Job* and yet epically essential; for in the sixteenth plate, following the Almighty's declaration of his sovereignty and preceding his acceptance of *Job*, he has introduced a scene of Satan falling as lightning from heaven. The photolithograph from this series, contained in the second volume, taken with the excellent description of the plates in the thirty-second chapter of the *Life*, will make many sigh for a sight of the original designs.

One has a sense of awe in looking at these designs, arising not wholly from the open presence of God and the powers of heaven and hell ranged about a type of human life, but from the exhibition of daring upon the part of the designer. Who is this man who thus stands, as it were, between heaven and earth, drawing aside the clouds and discovering to us the secrets of God? Is it some Titan, mocking at heaven? Or is it some angel, with the voice of a trumpet, saying, "Come up hither, and I will show thee things which must be hereafter"? We cannot mistake his attitude, for however we may start back timidly from the representation of eternity, we feel that the interpreter himself has neither shrunk from the presence of these scenes, nor rushed in upon them with unholy audacity. To have conceived these designs, the designer must have been, not inspired as with a flash from heaven enkindling his imagination, nor once and once only admitted to a near view of eternal mysteries, but a constant dweller amid such scenes, familiar with most awful presences,—so familiar indeed as to reproduce them in firm outline and with unfaltering touch.

In comparing Blake with his fellows, or in seeking his place in the history of art, we must take his most comprehensive attribute as the foundation for any classification or comparison. In his generation he was almost alone, perhaps he would have been alone in almost any generation, perhaps to-day such a one appearing amongst us would fare as hardly, for Blake was one of those who are not so much in advance of any age or school of art, as they are outside of it. Still, in certain aspects, we might class Blake among the mystics, or again, with larger reason, among the Gothic artists, with the men who built the cathedrals, toward whom, in fact, he always felt drawn in strong sympathy. But we choose rather to class Blake in the small number of distinctively Christian men of genius. When Blake said that art was Christianity and Christianity was art, he said what was true of his own art, which was the expression of a life with Christ personally in it, in distinction from one in which Christ's gifts through Christianity may be, but in which the personal Christ is not. If genius in art is known by its expression of universal truth, then is that the genius of Christian art which sees the component parts in the light of Christ's

revelation. Christ brought life and immortality to light: pagan art had expressed the search for life and immortality in the darkness of nature: Christian art concerns itself about the same realities, but works by the light of the world. The mythology of the ancients was beautiful, it embodied their spiritual life; but the distance between the fable of Psyche and the truth which that fable faintly shadowed, as revealed by Christ, is the distance in light between a statue of Psyche and the statuesque forms in the illustrations of Blair's Grave. Here do we place Blake among those who, throwing a bridge over the river of death and bringing into one field this world and the next, do it not with the wild guess of a human soul trying to follow the leadings of its own mysterious nature, but with the sure faith in a divine revelation.

We pore over the fruits of Blake's genius, wondering, perplexed, delighted, awed, and ask ourselves, Who is this man, and what did he have to do with earth? The Songs of Innocence are marvellously beautiful; who is this that sings them? The Inventions to the Book of Job are grand revelations; who is the man that has witnessed and can describe such scenes? The answer will be made by every one for himself according as he looks behind the outward life, faithfully portrayed in the biography, reads the opinions which Blake put forth, the poems which he wrote, and examines the designs which he executed. But all alike will not fail to perceive that the purest song which he sang was the life which he led, the noblest design which he executed was the manifestation of eternal beauty and majesty through the limitations of that nature by which he was constrained.

We should not be so touched by the loveliness of Blake's life, if it were set in the harmonious surrounding of green fields and country purity, and graced by the gentle independence of a plain dweller in his own cottage; but we see him maintaining quietly his even spirituality amidst the roar of London streets and in the poverty of an artisan's room. "I live in a hole here," he would say, "but God has a beautiful mansion for me elsewhere." It was this unswerving faith in God, making the realities of eternity more vivid than the mere tangibilities of space, that was the prevailing temper of Blake's

mind. Again and again he put aside opportunities of temporal advantage that he might have his "visions and peace."

"For that I cannot live," he writes to Mr. Butts, "without doing my duty to lay up treasures in heaven is certain and determined, and to this I have long made up my mind. And why this should be made an objection to me, while drunkenness, lewdness, gluttony, and even idleness itself, does not hurt other men, let Satan himself explain. The thing I have most at heart—more than life, or all that seems to make life comfortable without—is the interest of true religion and science. And whenever anything appears to affect that interest, (especially if I omit any duty to my station as a soldier of Christ,) it gives me the greatest of torments. I am not ashamed, afraid, or averse to tell you,—what ought to be told,—that I am under the direction of messengers from heaven, daily and nightly. But the nature of such things is not, as some suppose, without trouble or care. Temptations are on the right hand and on the left. Behind, the sea of time and space roars and follows swiftly. He who keeps not right onward is lost; and if our footsteps slide in clay, how can we do otherwise than fear and tremble! . . . If we fear to do the dictates of our angels, and tremble at the tasks set before us; if we refuse to do spiritual acts because of natural fears or natural desires; who can describe the dismal torments of such a state! I too well remember the threats I heard! 'If you, who are organized by Divine Providence for spiritual communion, refuse, and bury your talent in the earth, even though you should want natural bread,—sorrow and desperation pursue you through life, and after death shame and confusion of face to eternity. Every one in eternity will leave you, aghast at the man who was crowned with glory and honor by his brethren and betrayed their cause to their enemies. You will be called the base Judas who betrayed his friend!' Such words would make any stout man tremble, and how then could I be at ease? But I am now no longer in that state, and now go on again with my task, fearless, though my path is difficult. I have no fear of stumbling while I keep it."

This is the culmination of Blake's work, that in humble, childlike reverence he not merely recorded for men the spiritual discoveries which he made, but strove to order his life after the pattern of those things which he saw on the mount of God.